

Mrs. Bentley's Coloring Books

An Unspeakable Oath website bonus! A modern-day investigation for Call of Cthulhu by Badger McInnes. Illustrated by Matt Hansen, © 2013.

I. A Small and Fragile Thing

Wherein the Investigators are contacted regarding a delicate matter.

The Investigators have been contacted by Dr. Franklin Braziel, resident of the small Northern California coastal town of Wile's Break. Over the phone, Dr. Braziel requests a meeting with the Investigators at a place of their choosing, saying only that it is a matter that only people of the character's caliber can handle. At the meeting, Dr. Braziel informs the group that he is friends with, and doctor to, the Jacobson family. Over the past few weeks, Maggie Jacobson's daughter, Sarah, has been struck with a fatiguing illness that no professional can pin down. The girl, once bright and lively, has become listless and gray. Barely able or even willing to eat, the only object that seems to give Sarah any sort of life is a coloring book that she stole from her day care center.

Maggie claims that Sarah's health began to suffer a few weeks after attending the day care center, and she suspects that the coloring book may be the source of her daughter's suffering. Unfortunately, she has no proof to back up her claim, and this has only served to exacerbate her frustration.

Dr. Braziel is deeply worried. He's consulted many of the best doctors in the state, and no one has been able to come up with a diagnosis to what has been troubling Sarah. Moreover, Maggie is close to hysteria, seeing her child slowly wither away before her eyes. At this point, Dr. Braziel willing to try almost anything, and wishes the Investigators to check out the day care center, and it's owner, Mrs. Janice Bentley. If they agree, he stresses that they must use discretion; Wile's Break is a small, tightly-knit community, and Mrs. Bentley's supporters are numerous.



II. Of Colors and Water

Wherein the background of Mrs. Bentley is revealed.

In Wile's Break, Mrs. Janice Bentley has run the day-care center "Catching the Rainbow" for four years. The kids under her care range from one to seven years in age, and her class typically ranges from eight to 12 children. Mrs. Bentley is highly popular with the community, having a reputation for being incredibly kind and loving towards the children at her center; parents also note more disciplined behavior from their kids, as well as an increased scholastic aptitude after only a few weeks of attendance.

Alas, all is not as it seems in Mrs. Bentley's center.

Janice is an avid worshiper of Great Cthulhu, her family having been part of a cult in nearby Half Moon Bay that was in league with a small colony of Deep Ones living off the coast. Her "husband" was a Deep One himself, and after their mating Mrs. Bentley gave birth to a son, Peter. Janice and her family were driven out by the community (the cult's members, including Janice's parents, were blamed for the disappearances of local children, later found mutilated), and they moved 150 miles north to Wile's Break, where they could continue their degenerate practices in quiet. Mrs. Bentley's hybrid son favored his father, however, and they took to the sea when he was still a teenager. As far as the town is aware, Mrs. Bentley is a widower since her husband and son died in a car accident several years ago.

Each year at Catching the Rainbow, about a month or so after the start of a new class, she gives coloring books to the children. Each child gets a copy of the book, *Color As You Like*. To the untrained eye, these books, made by Mrs. Bentley herself, appear perfectly benign, with black and white line drawings of bunnies, bright suns peaking through billowy clouds, race cars, dogs, cats, other children playing, and so on. But hidden within these pages are sigils and signs that, when unknowingly traced or colored in by a child, draw one magic point from the young artist into the book.

Mrs. Bentley installed a safeguard in the books so that only one magic point a week can be extracted from a child. Even so, Mrs. Bentley takes great care to monitor each student who uses a coloring book. When she first introduced copies to her kids she found the book a bit too powerful, and several of her students feel seriously ill at virtually the same time. No cause was pinned down by local doctors, who later attributed the sicknesses to some weird strain of the flu, but Mrs. Bentley learned caution.

At the end of each day, Mrs. Bentley collects the books from her students, and draws the magic points stored in the coloring books into herself. With these magic points, Mrs. Bentley plans on opening a gate to R'lyeh and awakening Great Cthulhu himself. This will take a phenomenal amount of power to achieve. But that's okay. Mrs. Bentley is a patient woman.

And she has plenty of children to care for.

III. A Deadly Draining

Wherein details of the investigation are exposed.

Maggie Jacobson's daughter Sarah has been attending Mrs. Bentley's class for a little over two months. At first she did exceedingly well. Sarah has a keen desire for art, and when she was introduced to Mrs. Bentley's coloring books she fell in love with them. So much so that she stole an extra book from class. That was six weeks ago.

Unfortunately for Mrs. Bentley's plans, and for Sarah, children of an especially artistic and sensitive bent find themselves more adversely affected by the Colouring Book. In Sarah's case, the stolen

Colouring Book extracts three or more magic points per day. The child's dreams have become more and more vivid, with an addictive quality. Subconsciously, Sarah understands that if she continues to use the coloring book, her soothing, quiet visions of seascapes and undersea life will never cease.

Since then, Sarah has been spending more and more time every night, drawing and coloring away, brow furrowed with concentration. And little by little, Sarah's life force has been slipping away. Indeed, she has now deteriorated to the point where she cannot attend class anymore.

Maggie has had her daughter examined by some of the best doctors in the county, but no one has been able to deduce what is wrong with the child. Maggie has no money for expensive hospitals and is nearing her wit's end.

Noting Sarah's obsession with the coloring book, she examined it two nights ago. She found nothing physically unusual about the book, but felt an odd, queasy, pulling sensation when looking through the pages. Having no one else to turn to, she confided in Dr. Braziel, who in turn contacted the Investigators.

Questioning the Jacobsons

Maggie is a desperate mother, willing to do most anything to save the life of her daughter. She has done everything in her power to find a sane, explainable source to Sarah's illness. Only because all of her other avenues have been exhausted has she agreed to Dr. Braziel's suggestion to bring in the Investigators.

Mrs. Jacobson works in town as a curator for one of the local art galleries, and is a part-time painting instructor; some of her own works are on display at the gallery, and she's working on getting some of her pieces accepted at larger galleries in San Francisco.

If asked about her husband, she says his name was Benjamin and he died in a fishing accident three years ago.

Sarah herself was once a precocious, spritely child of six, but now appears listless and shrunken, a candle nearly snuffed out. She responds if spoken to or addressed directly but is otherwise quiet. Her skin feels clammy and emits a stale, musty odor. Her temperature is a constant 100 degrees, yet she cannot stand to wear anything less than several layers of blankets and clothes. She has been losing weight steadily.

Sarah does not spend all her time reading or coloring **Color As You Like,** but it is within her presence at all times. Investigators who attempt to take the book from her will be faced with an extremely upset child whose screaming and wailing will only be abated by the book being returned to her. The only time the Investigators can risk examining the Colouring Book without facing the wrath of Sarah is when she is asleep.

Trouble in Town

Probing the matter should be simple enough, but the Investigators are likely to run into several problems along the way.

Wile's Break is a small town, where everyone knows everybody else. Slinging wild accusations towards Mrs. Bentley, who is held in high regard in the community, won't go over well.

Actual physical evidence is scant at best. The Colouring Books themselves appear quite innocent at first. Investigators of an artistic or sensitive nature who examine the book experience the same slight feeling of vertigo that affected Mrs. Jacobson. (See the notes under "New Mythos Tome" for

ways an Investigator can be affected by the book and may be able to decipher its inner workings.) On a roll of POW x3 or less, the sound of rushing water accompanies the out-of-balance sensation.

Some of the children in Mrs. Bentley's care come from influential families where one of the parents is a policeman, shop owner, or councilperson. Families pay good money for the care and services Mrs. Bentley's school provides. The Investigators meet powerful resistance from folks who are very protective of their kids—kids who are enamored with Mrs. Bentley.

Police officer Evan Ross pulls over the Investigators as they drive through Wile's Break, citing them with a bogus traffic charge (running a stop sign, expired/obscured license plates, failing to stop for a pedestrian, etc.). Any resistance results in the driver arrested and tossed in jail. ("I'm sorry you feel that way, sir, but we take our public safety very seriously in this town. I'm not sure what you big-city types are used to, but we can further discuss this at the station.")

The owner of the hotel suddenly evicts the Investigators from their room, citing an emergency fumigation. ("My apologies, sir. Rats again. Don't wanna lose my license and have the place shut down, y'know?") Attempts at booking rooms at other hotels will fail, with hotel managers all claiming that there are no vacancies.

Car mechanic Hubert Wright, at an opportune moment, attempts to sabotage an Investigator's vehicle in some way, either to disable it completely (draining the engine oil or removing the distributor cap), or to give Officer Ross an excuse to pull the car over later (such as faulty tail/headlights or wheel alignment that causes difficult steering).

At a restaurant, Tom's Box Car Diner, at least one Investigator suffers food poisoning at the hands of the manager, Tom Tobolowski, unless he or she succeeds on a roll of CON x3. ("Goodness, is friend okay? Must be bad meat. Try fish instead, is local. I get towel.") Failing the roll results in headaches and vomiting for 12 hours. If an Investigator is examined, a doctor (Dr. Brazil would be a good option here) can confirm the illness as being caused by rat poison.

The owner of the *Wile's Break Journal*, Melvin O'Brien, assigns one of his reporters (Eddie Lawter) to conspicuously follow the Investigators, asking irritating questions about their personal lives and what they're doing in town. He shows up at inopportune times, such as during a meal or an interview. Over the next few days, any Investigator reading the *Journal* finds front page articles detailing the Investigator's actions, complete with photographs. They show where they're staying, who they've interviewed, and perhaps most troublingly, who hired them.

Questioning Mrs. Bentley

If the Investigators decide to question Mrs. Bentley, they find her amenable and forthcoming. Yes, she has noticed Sarah's decline in health. No, she can't attribute it to anything going on in her classroom or school. Sure, there was a recent cold outbreak last month that affected the students and one of her two assistant teachers, but it seems to have run its course. Yes, she has noticed that one of her books has been missing; Mrs. Bentley supposes it was lost or else taken by mistake by the janitor. She loses track of at least one or two books a year. It comes to no surprise to her that yet another one has walked off on its own.

Mrs. Bentley comes across as a very pleasant, intelligent woman in her early 40s. She of course scoffs at the idea that she would want to cause harm to her kids; she loves them all very much, and besides, that would be a tad bad for business, now wouldn't it? She has no problem allowing the Investigators to search her classroom or talk to the other children who attend the center. If Investigators request it, she allows them to view her accounting books. They contain nothing suspicious.

If accused of wrongdoing, Mrs. Bentley for her defense relies on her reputation among the community and her obvious love of the children. She has found those much more effective than

nasty spells or groups of thugs. If townsfolk feel that the Investigators are harassing Mrs. Bentley, they may interfere. If played correctly, this can be tougher for Investigators to crack through than an army of nightgaunts. See "Trouble in Town."

Only if she suspects that the Investigators are getting too close to the truth — they aren't being dissuaded by the hostile town, and they're on the verge of either convincing the public of the truth or attacking her physically — does Janice use spells or summon Deep Ones to distract them while she escapes. Mrs. Bentley would not be above casting Implant Fear at an Investigator driving a vehicle to cause a crash, or using Raise Night Fog to engulf Wile's Break in mists to cover her tracks while she escapes town.

Mrs. Bentley stores her stolen magic points in an idol of Cthulhu that has been carved out of a piece of coral, given to her by her husband before he took permanently to the sea. The idol is kept in Janice's house at the bottom of a large saltwater fish tank in her living room, partially wrapped in seaweed. If her house is ever searched by the Investigators, no fish food is found; the idol keeps the fish and seaweed in the tank alive magically.

IV. Keeper Information

Characters, spells and tomes

Mrs. Janice Bentley, age 43

Day-Care Teacher and Worshipper of Cthulhu

STR 8 CON 12 SIZ 7 INT 16 POW 15
DEX 10 APP 12 EDU 17 SAN 0 HP 09

Damage Bonus: -1D4

Attacks: None

Skills: Art (Drawing) 55%, Astronomy 23%, Credit Rating 75%, Cthulhu Mythos 17%, First Aid 55%, Library Use 56%, Listen 65%, Persuade 80%, Psychology 47%, Read Children's Books Aloud 78%, Spot Hidden 52%, Swim 63%, Wipe Dirty Faces 66%.

Spells: Contact Cthulhu, Cloud Memory, Contact Deep One, Create Gate, Implant Fear, Raise Night Fog, Siphon Children's Laughter.

New Spell

SIPHON CHILD'S LAUGHTER: This spell comes in two parts: creating the medium (in this case, a coloring book) inscribed with sigils to extract the children's life force, or magic points; and drawing the magic points from the material afterward.

Creating the material medium the caster to be within eyesight of the sea during an overcast night. The medium may be made from any material, but the sigils must be a be created from a mix of squid ink, the blood of a sea-faring mammal, crushed Deep One scales, and other such outre ingredients.

Creating the medium — the book — costs 1/1D6 SAN. Once the book is created, the spell does not need to be "cast" as other spells usually are. Instead, the "target" (in this case, the child or other person coloring the book) must trace or color in the book for at least 30 minutes. At that time, the child using the book must roll CON x 2 or lose one magic point to the Coloring Book. No more than one magic point in a week can be lost by a person in this way, due to the restrictions Mrs. Bentley has imposed on her copies of **Color As You Like.**

To extract the magic points, the caster merely recites a series of verbal incantations in the language of the Deep Ones. Each chant lasts about five minutes per coloring book.

New Mythos Tome

Color As You Like. *English. SAN loss 0/1D3; Cthulhu Mythos +2 percentiles; average 1 hour to study and comprehend (but see below). Spell: Siphon Child's Laughter.*

Color As You Like is a 48-page, 8.5" x 11" coloring book for children one to seven years old, made with a full-color cover and filled with black line drawings. It is printed in local pressings of about 30 copies a year. The cover depicts a simply-drawn beach scene, looking out into the ocean. Fish, turtles, and sea birds are scattered about, and two dolphins leap out of the water. A rainbow arches over the top portion of the cover, containing the title of the book. Inside are outlines of various animals engaging in all sorts of activities; bear cubs playing baseball, whales bouncing rubber balls in the sea, dogs cooking in the kitchen, starfish making sandcastles, and so on. More than half of the pictures deal with scenes in or near the ocean. No other kind of location gets this much attention.

"Sam the Snake loves to play with the frogs that come from the sea! Sam loves all animals that live in the water!" — *Color As You Like*, by Janice Bentley

If a copy of the coloring book is examined closely, and the Investigator's player makes a successful Spot Hidden roll or Occult roll, sigil-like runes will be found within the line work of the figures and animals of the book. If viewed for more than a minute or so by an adult (children are immune to this effect due to Mrs. Bentley's careful crafting of the spell), the artwork appears to the Investigator to drop and fall within the pages of the book itself. The reader's chest begins to feel weighted, as if from external pressure slowly but surely increasing its force on all sides. This sensation lasts for only a second or two but costs the Investigator 0/1 SAN. The next time the Investigator sleeps, he or she experiences dreams and visions of swimming through cool, deep water, surrounded by humanoid figures with elongated arms, scaled and finned skin, and large, bulbous, unblinking eyes. In the distance, an enormous, faintly-glowing city can be seen, composed of vast spires of corral and massive stone work.

What happens if an Investigator is foolish enough to begin coloring one of the books depends on the individual:

- 1) An Investigator who is not particularly artistically inclined and has no knowledge of the Mythos experiences a slight headache and loses 1 magic point. Lost MP recover normally.
- 2) An Investigator who has an artistic bent and/or is sensitive to dreams (more than 25% in any Art skill, or any points in the Dreaming skill) might become addicted to the coloring book. For every page colored after the first, have the player make a POW x 5% roll. Failure indicates the Investigator refuses to part with the coloring book and feels compelled to color in another page. The next day, the Investigator may attempt to discard the coloring book, but rolls at POW x 4%. Thereafter, the chance to break the compulsion decreases by x1 per day to a minimum of POW x 1%. Each night, dreams of Deep Ones haunt the Investigator, becoming more lengthy, detailed, and alluring.
- 3) An Investigator who is an accomplished artist (more than 50% in any Art skill) and has points in the Cthulhu Mythos skill is affected similarly, but the POW rolls start at x4. Each time that Investigator fails a POW roll, he or she also loses 0/1D2 SAN. However, after the first failed Sanity roll, the Investigator understands the inner workings of the coloring book and the nature of its effects on those who use it.